

International student challenges for innovative education. results from three years of urban farm

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Student challenges are becoming a paramount testing ground for the application of a number of innovative educational methodologies. Design thinking/case study, inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, gamification and distance learning are catching on in education systems around the world, enhancing students’ ability to retain information and acquire new skills. The International Student Challenge “UrbanFarm”, organized by the University of Bologna, has been an important opportunity to put these methodologies in place and observe and study their effects on students’ learning process. Multidisciplinary student teams, with members from different Universities from all around the world, were asked to deliver innovative urban agricultural project proposals for the recovery of abandoned/vacant urban sites, by integrating architectural and technological innovations while pursuing social, environmental, and economic sustainability. At present, while there are several international student challenges fostering student growth worldwide, and some follow-up surveys to assess their effect on participants were designed, disseminated and eventually analyzed, there is a lack of scientific work addressing the real outcomes of such challenges. The hereby study aims to quantitatively assess how participation in UrbanFarm Challenge has affected students’ acquisition of new information, their ability to work within a multidisciplinary and international team, along with their future job perspectives. Furthermore, the study also assesses how the student’s experience in the Challenge was affected by the ongoing pandemics. Data are collected through an online survey circulated both to students from Universities worldwide, including both UrbanFarm participants of all three editions (2019, 2020 and 2021) and other students that did not participate in UrbanFarm.

Keywords: urban farming, student challenge, innovative education methodologies, survey analysis.